DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 052 205 TE 002 491

TITLE	A Senior High School Interdisciplinary Humanities Curriculum. Final Report.
INSTITUTION	City Univ. of New York, N.Y. Hunter Coll. High School.
PUB DATE	70
NOTE	10p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Creative Expression, Educational Innovation, *Educational Programs, *Grade 12, High School Students, *Humanities Instruction, *Interdisciplinary Approach, Learning Activities

ABSTRACT

The Hunter College High School Twelfth grade humanities curriculum was designed to end the artificiality between life and learning as found in the traditional program of studies. An effort was made to restructure the final year of high school to focus on Man rather than subjects, to see the interrelationships of the disciplines, and to end the "senior slump." The objective was to move outside the school walls and make the entire city a learning laboratory. Eight teachers in six different disciplines constituted the humanities committee who, with the project director, sought to integrate disciplines into more direct, coherent relationships. Four major themes were chosen as the central focus for each nine-week period: (1) "The Public Man," (2) "The Private Man," (3) "Man and Woman," and (4) "The Relationship of Man and Society." For each theme, the students, in consultation with one of the humanities teachers, prepared a project or some form of creative work. The level of involvement the students experienced gave them a greater qualitative understanding of achievement. Results include: (1) students feel they have gained from the program; (2) teachers and school administrators from distant schools have come to see the unique dimensions of the curriculum; (3) teachers consider it an honor to be a member of the humanities team; and (4) college admissions officers welcome the students. (CK)

ED052205

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TE 002 491

Institution: Hunter College High School of the City University of New York

Project Director: Bernard S. Miller, Principal

Project Title: "A Senior High School Interdisciplinary Humanities Curriculum"

Grant Number: H 69-0-179

Grant Period: July 1, 1969 - September 30, 1970

Amount of Grant: $48,964.00

FINAL REPORT

HUNTER COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT -

The Hunter College High School twelfth grade humanities curriculum was designed to end the artificiality between life and learning as is found in the traditional program of studies. We sought to restructure the final year of high school to focus on Man rather than subjects, to see the interrelationships of the disciplines, to end the "senior slump" which is so much a part of the academic scene in schools across the country.

Too much of education, we insist, is doing to and for students. Our goal was to make learning more significant, more relevant long after tests were graded and returned, by doing with students. And we believed that school would take on new excitement if together, students and teachers dealt with questions which had no predetermined answers in the back of the book, or in the teacher's head. Our objective was to move outside of the school walls and make the entire city a learning laboratory, to deal with the basic problems of human behavior, character, and values in an urbanized environment.

As a faculty we were painfully aware that hopes and expectations for new courses and approaches are often grandiloquent and founded on the somewhat naive belief that "if it's new, it's better." In setting objectives, we essayed modestly and cautiously, not only despite our enthusiasm, but because of it. As a laboratory school in a college where more undertraduates are prepared for teaching careers

than in any other New York City institution, we felt most keenly the obligation to break new educational ground for these prospective teachers to witness and eventually adapt for themselves. We knew too that the Hunter College High School reputation would bring many visitors to our humanities experiment. And we wished to make the senior year for high school students a stimulating climax rather than a drudgery.

Here are five of the major outcomes we hoped would occur:

1. A sustained deliberate attempt would be made to synthesize and relate learning from different disciplines, to the end that the students' learning would be less fragmented, and therefore more meaningful.

2. An examination would be made of the ways in which some great human beings have defined for themselves what it means to be a human being, to the end that students would search for their own humaneness.

3. In individual creative projects, both in and out of school, each student would draw upon her own interests, curiosity, and abilities to enjoy the satisfactions of work well done, to the end that she further identifies and individuates herself.

4. The structure of the humanities curriculum would be so organized that the nature of the program on any particular day will determine how classes should be arranged rather than the other way around.

5. Through group planning and interaction, the humanities team of teachers and students would learn from one another and respect one another's differences, so that all who participate in the program acquire broader academic perspectives and greater personal insights.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

We began with eight teachers in six different disciplines, two each in English and social studies, and one in music, art, drama and the dance. These teachers constituted the humanities committee, who, with the project director, sought to integrate the disciplines into more direct, coherent relationships, to radicalize the school schedule, and to set goals, without at the same time destroying the well-being of the rest of the school. Morale is not enhanced if one class and one group of teachers are having special benefits and the majority of the school is neglected. The necessity to notify and invite the regular staff and students to share in the bounty of outside speakers, films, and other special features was recognized. A schedule of each week's program was also posted on the faculty bulletin board.

Four major themes were chosen as the central focus for each nine week period. The first, "The Public Man," coincided with the 1968 presidential election. Students dealt with the question of why some people seek public office, the nature of leadership, the uses and misuses of power, the public life of public people, etc. Readings included selections from Plato's Republic and the Apology. All students read Shakespeare's King Lear and then attended a performance of the production at Lincoln Center. Shaw's Saint Joan, Machiavelli's The Prince and James Joyce's Portrait of An Artist As A Young Man, were other works studied. The mass media and film were extensively utilized. On different

days students saw A Man For All Seasons, Becket, and The Lion In Winter, and then met to discuss the productions with author James Goldman. Kinescopes of Senator Ted Kennedy's eulogy of his brother in Saint Patrick's Cathedral and the Nixon "Checkers" speech were analyzed. In conjunction with the reading of Plato's Apology, students read Martin Luther King's Apology From Birmingham Jail.

As part of their creative work experience for this theme "The Public Man," several students interlaced the two "Apology" dialogues and to the accompaniment of videotaped music, the ideas of the two authors, Plato and King, were dramatized in a meaningful performance.

All the students were asked to identify with a national or local political candidate and to help in his election. Some students, who couldn't stomach any of the candidates, chose to conduct a socialogical study and predict how a certain election district would vote on Election Day. One student selected several musical themes and created an eulogy to John F. Kennedy.

The second theme was "The Private Man," the third, "Man and Woman," and the last, "The Relationships of Man and Society." For each theme, the students, in consultation with one of the humanities teachers, prepared a project or some form of creative work. Our one requirement was that the students utilize a different discipline for major emphasis each time they moved to a new theme. Thus a student who concentrated in the field of music for the first theme might use art, film,

dance, history or literature as her major expression for the next theme.

One of the unique features of the Hunter College High School humanities curriculum is the combination of the academic with the affective, the cerebral as well as the visceral. The student schedule was sufficiently flexible to permit both large and small group sessions for discussion of readings, films, slides, and to hear guest lectures. But time was also made available for students to meet with their project teacher in the humanities or even not to attend school if the project experience required work to be done elsewhere.

Why this concern with giving students opportunities to have creative, practical experiences? Seminal ideas gained from attending a concert, visiting an art gallery, or reading a book have unquestioned merit. But the humanities must not just be intellectualized. They must be felt. It is not enough to read a poem, see a film, or go on an architectural tour of the city -- all of which was done. Students need more if learning is to have lasting value. They need to perceive the pain and the joy of writing their own poems, preparing their own films, and planning their own environment for living. One important level of understanding and sensitivity is attained when we comprehend what others have accomplished; a different and often deeper level is achieved when the students themselves become the creators. The level of involvement becomes a qualitative, rather than a quantitative difference.

The Hunter College High School humanities curriculum was an elective program. Students could choose the regular twelfth grade courses in English, physical education, and social studies or they could select the three period (approximately two hour) morning or afternoon humanities. In a senior class of 130, all but ten enrolled in the humanities. Sicty students were assigned to each session. All students chose three other subjects in addition to the humanities -- advanced placement courses, foreign language, science, mathematics, etc. Students in the humanities received no grades. An anecdotal record of each student's creative work was forwarded to college admission officers and made a part of the student's record.

Each humanities session included an English and social studies teaching team who were available to meet with students for three consecutive periods each day of the week. In addition, these teachers had a common meeting period which was programmed as part of their humanities curriculum commitment. The two teams of English and social studies teachers in morning and afternoon sessions taught one class of students in the lower terms along with their humanities assignment. The four teachers in art, music, drama, and the dance had the equivalent of five periods each week for project sessions with students in the morning humanities, and a similar arrangement for the afternoon humanities.

Because students played a major role in thinking through the curriculum with the faculty as the year progressed, it was impossible to agree on directions to take in the course of a typical school day. Many sessions moved along into late afternoon. The actual time allotment indicated in this report does not do justice to the long hours spent by students and teachers in developing a cohesive curriculum.

RESULTS:

How do we measure the success of this educational adventure in the humanities? We are long on subjective reactions, woefully short on objective data. We are fully aware that several of our experiments proved to be too ambitious, several had not been clearly thought through, several made improper hypotheses about the ability of the staff to work together. In a number of instances our structure was so flexible that students had no benchmarks from which to move and so some chose not to move at all.

In the program's second year a healthier framework was created for student exploration. By combining workshops with seminar sessions, the best of the possible humanistic world was achieved. In workshops the students developed action programs and creative expressions; in seminars they dealt with the intellectual understandings of literary and historical contributions during select periods of time - fifth century Athens, the Renaissance, early twentiety century and the contemporary scene.

Several positive results should be cited:

1. Probably the best barometer of a program's success will be found in whether the customers -- the students -- come back for more. They have, and with increased enthusiasm. First, the students who lived through the initial humanities curriculum have taken the time to tell us how much they gained. Here, for example, is a letter from a student at college, by no means atypical:

> "the humanities experience was something to enjoy and although I'm still not far away from it enough to evaluate it properly, I have often thought about the books we've read, and the opportunities to explore... The program helped me see the necessity of relating events, and of helping others..."

Second, this year's students, all except a handful who were accelerated and had no program flexibility, are now enrolled. The word went out from the previous class -- the humanities curriculum makes sense.

2. Both teachers and school administrators from as far away as Hawaii, and Tucson, Arizona, have come to see the unique dimensions of our curriculum. The project director has been asked to speak at many conferences on the program's rationale and organization. We have been well received.

3. Teachers in our own school consider it an honor to be a member of the humanities team even though they must work much harder than they would if they conducted separate classes.

4. Students in the lower grades and their parents were apprehensive that the humanities curriculum would be curtailed when the grant terminated. We have incorporated the necessary funds into our regular budget for 1970-71. The Hunter faculty voted for the humanities program even though it meant that other electives would be curtailed.

5. Parents of students in the current humanities curriculum have expressed admiration for a program that keeps the dinner conversation so animated each evening at home.

6. College admission officers have welcomed our students with a humanistic background even though we complicate their admission procedures by refusing to give grades.

STATUS AND ANTICIPATED DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS:

The Board of Higher Education now underwrites the entire humanities program. The State Education Department in Albany has already singled out our humanities curriculum for special mention in their publication, Humanities Is..... We are a continuing reference point for them and for others who seek to find humanities programs where students are actively rather than passively involved. By September 1971, a detailed analysis of the Hunter College High School humanities curriculum, its concept, organization, implementation, and results will be ready for publication. The project director will also be available, indeed eager, to spread the humanistic gospel to schools across the country. Finally, we anticipate an accelerating number of visitors to see our program in action. There is no question that the National Endowment for the Humanities has provided us with potent germ carriers on behalf of a radically restructured education. Our gratitude to the Foundation will be seen in how eagerly we welcome other school systems to adopt a humanistic curriculum.

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